

UC 410 – Spring 2009
Ethical Issues and Contemporary Religious Conviction

Instructor: Vasilis Tsompanidis tsompas@gmail.edu Office: Kerns 216 Office Hours: M 1:00-2:00pm, F 11:00-12:00pm, and by appointment Phone: 236-6221 (Office) & 261-0475 (Home)	Section 09: M, W, F 12:00-12:50pm Kerns 01
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Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the philosophical investigation of morality. Among the questions we will consider: What makes certain actions morally impermissible? Is there a systematic theory that can capture our moral intuitions? Do the same moral principles apply to everyone, or are moral judgments relative to a particular society, a particular culture, or even to particular individuals? Should we decide what is the morally right thing to do by looking at the consequences of our actions, or are some actions simply right in and of themselves?

We will examine questions like these while concurrently discussing some specific and pressing moral questions such as abortion, euthanasia, animal rights, and the just distribution of wealth. A thorough examination of the abstract moral theories should provide a foundation for addressing these issues in "applied ethics" which will elevate the latter discussions from the level of just "trading intuitions". At the same time, examining practical issues will provide a basis for evaluating the abstract moral theories.

General Education Goal:

Students will demonstrate an understanding of the ethical dimensions of personal, societal, and professional life, including Judeo-Christian perspectives.

Course Objectives:

1. Critically examine moral issues students will be likely to face personally, professionally and as responsible citizens, articulating the grounding and implications of the positions.
2. Interpret the ethical issues raised by contemporary events, examining their sources and interrelatedness.
3. Articulate some of the basic positions and principles embodied in the development of ethical thought.

During and upon completion of the course, the student should show an adequate ability to:

4. Demonstrate an appreciation of the complexities of arriving at many ethical decisions
5. Work at development of one's reading, writing, speaking, and thinking skills
6. Make efforts to challenge one's own ideas and to respectfully engage others' ideas
7. Contribute toward a climate conducive to one's learning, such as by coming to class prepared, participating constructively, and encouraging other students to participate.

Texts:

John Arthur, *Morality and Moral Controversies*, Eighth Edition. Prentice Hall.
Handouts & supplementary articles distributed in class.

TENTATIVE SYLLABUS

UC 410: Spring Semester 2009 (M-W-F 12:00-12:50 p.m.)

42 sessions

January	5	Introduction; Syllabus, Policies
	7	What is Ethics? (Class Poll to be re-evaluated at the end of the semester)
	9	Introduction to Logic – Argument Fallacies
	12	Moral Relativisms Reading: Arthur, pp. 32-41 (“Relativism in Ethics”, M. Midgley
	14	“Trying Out One’s New Sword”)
	16	Ethical Egoism / Altruism
	21	<i>Ethics and the News (1):</i> Article-copy and question list due
	23	Consequentialism & Utilitarianism
	26	Reading: Arthur pp. 65-72 (selections from Mill “Utilitarianism”),
	30	83-89 (“The Real & Alleged Problems of Utilitarianism”)
	2	Famine & Affluence
February	4	Reading: Peter Singer “Famine, Affluence & Morality”
	6	Justice and Liberty Reading: Arthur pp. 450-451 (Hume “Of Justice”, Rawls)
	9	First Midterm Test
	11	Deontology & Kantianism
	13	Reading: Arthur pp. 56-65 (selections from <i>The Metaphysic of Morals</i>),
	16	78-83 (O’Neil “Kant & Utilitarianism Contrasted”)
	18	War & Terrorism Thought-essay paper #1 due (2/18)
	20	Reading: Thomas Nagel “War & Massacre”
	2	<i>Ethics and the News (2):</i> Article-copy and question list due
March	4	Virtue Ethics
	6	Reading: Arthur pp 50-56 (selections from <i>Nichomachean Ethics</i>)
	9	Animal Well-Being Reading: Arthur pp. 158-167 (Singer “All Animals Are Equal”,
	11	“Speciesism & the Idea of Equality”), 173-177 (Baxter, “People or Penguins”)
	13	Second Midterm Test
	16	
	18	Feminist Ethics
	20	Reading: Arthur pp. 89-93 (Held, “Feminist Transformations of Moral Theory”)
	23	Religious Perspectives
	25	Reading: Arthur pp. 16-23 (“Morality, Religion & Conscience”)
	27	Thought-essay paper #2 due
	30	Abortion
	1	Reading: Arthur, pp. 206-239 (selections from <i>Roe v. Wade</i> ,
April	3	Thomson “A Defense of Abortion”, Marquis “ <i>An Argument That Abortion Is Wrong</i> ”
	6	<i>Ethics and the News (3):</i> Article-copy and question list due
	8	Life Decisions
	15	Reading: Arthur pp. 248-260 (Rachels “Active & Passive Euthanasia”)
	17	Death Penalty (Terlmmutter - “Desert and Capital Punishment”)
	20	
	22	Final Paper Presentations Final Paper due
	24	
	28	Final Exam (3:30-5:30)

The above schedule is tentative; changes will be announced in class. While assignments will be due as indicated above (unless otherwise announced), the order of the topics might vary slightly.

Assignments:

(i) 3 Tests = 45% (First Midterm 15%, Second Midterm 15%, Final Exam 15%).

All the tests will be partly objective and partly essay.

They will not be comprehensive, i.e. all three cover different material.

(ii) Thought papers and final paper = 40%

(First Paper: 2-3 pages 10%)

Second Paper: 2-3 pages 10%

Final Paper: 3-5 pages 20%)

The first two critical thought-essays will be about topics studied in that portion of the course. Thus, the second paper will address a topic studied since the first paper was due. Suggested topics will be distributed in class. The final paper will be a more substantial treatment of one of the issues we discussed during the term and will be accompanied by a class presentation. The instructor will hand out more details on the specifics for each paper well in advance.

(iii) News presentations, general class participation, possible quizzes = 15%.

For the "News" assignments, students will turn in a cover sheet title page and article photocopy. The title page will include identifying information and a list of the main ethical issues raised by the article. More details will be provided in a handout.

The rest of this portion of your grade will be determined by active, intelligent, informed participation in class. If the overall student participation in the class is not adequately high, there might be some several-minute, in-class writing tasks about the day's work (quizzes). You will be informed for them at least a session in advance.

Other Policies:

Students must complete all parts of the course to earn a passing grade. Thus, papers, news assignments, possible quizzes and tests should not be thought of as optional. Because of this requirement, it is your responsibility to make sure that your instructor has received all the assignments. For instance, it would be too late to approach the instructor during finals week and claim that you submitted your first paper and he misplaced it. If you do not receive your grade when the other students do, it is time to ask the instructor about your assignment.

Make-up tests will be given only if there is written documentation of an urgent situation. If you anticipate or discover a problem, for example, because of health or personal situations or schedule conflicts or uncertainty about some aspect of any assignment, you must communicate with the instructor about this as soon as you become aware of it. The quickest way to contact the instructor, other than communicating with him before or after class or at his office, is to call and leave messages at his phone number. If you have to send an email about it, make sure the instructor replies with an acknowledgement.

Late assignments are penalized by one half letter per (unexcused) session late, with a maximum of four sessions for a passing grade, applied to the paper's grade. No late papers will be accepted in the last week of classes or during finals.

A pattern of lateness to class, frequent or early departure from class or disruptive behavior will adversely affect the course grade. The extent of effect on the grade will depend on the extent of lateness, disruptiveness, or departures.

In accordance with policies of the university, cheating and plagiarism will not be permitted, and will result in failure for that assignment and possibly for the course, as well as other penalties. Read the university's current policies in the student handbook regarding academic integrity. This can be found at

http://oldsite.capital.edu/cc/stusvcs/Academic_Integrity_Policy.pdf